DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 057 371 CG 006 732

AUTHOR Weber, Robert E.
TITLE Urban Education and the Fiscal Conscience.
INSTITUTION New Jersey State Dept. of Education, Trenton.
PUB DATE Feb 71
NOTE 8p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS City Problems; *Disadvantaged Youth; *Educational Finance; *Educational Problems; Expenditure Per Student; Resource Allocations; School Conditions; School Environment; Tax Allocation; Tax Support; *Urban Education; *Urban Schools

ABSTRACT

The author takes a critical look at inner city schools and sees their plight as the paramount problem currently facing the United States. He stresses the enormity of the problem by listing the primary ills which characterize inner city education: obsolete buildings, insufficient and inappropriate materials, inferior teachers, as well as multiple deleterious effects of ghetto life. The inadequate, sometimes destructive, system is seen as a result of a refusal to tax ourselves sufficiently to solve problems involving minority groups. Our education budget is but a small portion of the total United States budget, and smaller than the education budgets of far "less developed" countries. The author concludes that only when we put human growth and development priorities back into the realm of reason can we rectify this man-made "problem." (TL)

ED057371

# URBAN EDUCATION AND THE FISCAL CONSCIENCE

by

Robert E. Weber

Office of Planning
New Jersey Department of Education

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

CG 006 732

February 1971

Former Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, John Gardner, said, "History is not going to deal kindly with a rich nation that will not tax itself to cure its miseries".* Chief among these miseries, of course, is education in the inner city, where our cumulative failure to alleviate or solve problems has resulted in social and economic costs that are both unconscionable and intolerable.

The inner city in most large urban areas is an environment in which all forces--teachers, administrators, the school board, parents, children, municipal government, appear to have conspired either actively or passively to thwart the educational development of the children and their schools. The mutual harm, or synecrosis, in this environment is attested to by the failures of the inner city school--intolerable dropout rates, high teacher turnover rates, substantial pupil I.Q. losses (school-induced artificial retardation), a high incidence of delinquent and anomalous behavior, pervasive reading and arithmetic retardation, a higher rate of attendance in detention schools, a low production of occupationally trained students, and a staggeringly low rate of college-bound students and by the impressive number of failures on the part of new programs aimed at improving the quality of education in the ghetto schools to penetrate the seemingly insurmountable barriers which keep the ghetto locked in helplessness and hopelessness.

Most social scientists agree that the urban crisis is the largest and most pressing problem facing us. Moreover, among all the problems in the urbanology spectrum, the problem of education in the inner city appears to be paramount, for this is the point of intervention where all the bad cycles have the potential of being arrested and eventually reversed. To say

---

*The New Republic, April 27, 1968

that the problem of education in the inner city is formidable is to understate the case; it is a problem which no other society has ever had to face, for our society is riding the front of an exponential curve (i.e., it peaked first for us) which began in antiquity and which culminates in the chaos of neon, noise, and physical and spiritual squalor, where denizens rather than citizens, squandor the precious moments of their existence in lives of alienation, anomie, and disenfranchisement, producing, in turn, repetition of the cycle.

Some sense of the enormity of the problem lying before us can be gained by a look at the list of the primary ills of inner city education:

- o School buildings are obsolete and overcrowded.
- o Teachers tend to be inferior to those in the schools in higher-income areas; there is a much higher percentage of ESRP's (Emergency Substitutes in a Regular Position); and few of the teachers have had little (or no) preparation in the special problems posed by ghetto minority-group children.
- o The money spent/child/year is often half that of suburban schools (due, in part, to disappearing tax bases).
- o The ghetto child enters school below national norms and the gap is often increased during his sojourn in school. His negative age-grade status is generally the result of social promotion, so that even this "achievement" turns out to be a cruel hoax. Real measures of achievement, the standing of the ghetto child relative to national norms, show the ghetto child to be severely retarded in reading and arithmetic (in some cities only 6% are above national norms). Language arts failure is particularly crucial, for when we apply the Domino Theory to education, we find that the first domino to fall is the failure to

learn to read. As the saying goes, "We learn to read so that we can read to learn." The implications of this for the three levels of growth (cognition, feeling and behavior) result in the collapse of multiple dominoes: general academic failure, negative self-image, failure orientation and deviant forms of expression and behavior.

- o Supportive services are either non-existent or so minimal as to be of dubious value. For instance, many ghetto schools have no free lunch or free milk programs, no school social workers, and limited guidance and counselling facilities.
- o There is little parental involvement, little community advocacy, and token ethnic representation on school boards.
- o Curricular materials are used which, in addition to often being irrelevant, are often worn and obsolete and methodologies are employed which are inappropriate to the life and learning styles of the ghetto child.
- o Teachers condition poor learning performance through attitudes of low expectation and punitiveness.
- o Many teachers spend half or more of their time on problems of discipline and administration.
- o The ghetto child (and his family) is often a multiple problem child, requiring (as does his family) a larger percentage of other social services.
- o The ghetto home is not scholastically oriented nor does it contain either readiness or supplementary materials for the cognitive stimulation of the child.
- o The urban schools are so overly centralized as to produce a bureaucratic rigidity that defies problem solving, innovation, and change. The ghetto environment with its luring street corners and illegal activities, competes avidly with the school for possession of the children.

- The confinement atmosphere of the ghettos, relative to the schools' expectations, results in the child's limited experience, limited horizons and deficits regarding social and environmental diversity. De facto segregation, of course, abets this.
- The discrimination which the ghetto child experiences contributes mightily to his self-negation and poor self-image and he perceives and experiences schooling--whether through the track system, social promotion, lack of vocational education facilities, or just plain poor education--as being a partner in programming him into a future that he rejects and which is barren of opportunity.

The observations listed above are obviously not new. In fact many of them were made a half dozen years ago by such investigators as Deutsch,[1] Sexton,[2] Riessman,[3] Conant,[4] Passow[5] and others. In another way, though, the list of inner city educational ills has an unfortunate familiarity, in the sense that after years of Federal and foundation funding, the anatomy of inner city education has changed little, if at all. It appears clear that the increased Federal spending since 1963 did not solve many problems; increased spending, if unaccompanied by innovation and real change, accomplishes very little.

Inner city education remains at best a pathetically inadequate system and at worst a destructive system, helplessly entangled in problems

---

1. Martin Deutsch, "Minority Groups and Class Status as Related to Social and Personality Factors in Scholastic Achievement", Society for Applied Anthropology, Monograph Number 2, 1960.
2. Patricia Sexton, Education and Income (New York: Viking Press, 1961).
3. Frank Riessman, The Culturally Deprived Child (New York: Harpers Brothers, 1962).
4. James Conant, Slums and Suburbs (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961).
5. A. Harry Passow (ed), Education in Depressed Areas (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1963).

of its technology's, and demography's making and blind to the myriad possibilities of its own liberation.

Save for the sanctity of millions of individuals, some urbanologists could make a persuasive case for letting some of our cities go "down the drain", for heeding what can only be construed as the death wish of the dying city, especially those cities in which, on top of everything else, the political administration is so venal and corrupt as to corrode the effectiveness of all our programmatic efforts and dollar expenditures.

However, permitting ghost cities to develop--clusters of eroded or ravaged "communities" surrounded by suburbs--is not a solution; it is "leaving the field" and at a time when we must belatedly face up to the cumulative effects of city-building that have occurred since ancient times. We are witnessing a history of neglect and, as we view it, the conviction grows more strong that we have been reticent about taxing ourselves to solve problems where minority group advocacy is missing and where, as a partial consequence, problems can be ignored or made to be as subterranean as the subways and the sewers.

The following quotation adds some perspective:

> "The total tax take in this country as of 1966...was 28.2 percent of our GNP (41.1 percent in Sweden, 38.6 percent in France, 34.9 percent in West Germany, 31.3 in the UK)."*

However, we must take a look at allocations of tax dollars within this structure. For example we are taxing ourselves to the extent that we are paying $9,287,100 per hour for Space, Atomic Energy and Defense Programs ($2,750,400 per hour for the war in South Vietnam alone); yet our total Health, Education and Welfare spending is only $1,340,006 per hour and our Office of

---

*The New Republic, April 20, 1968, p. 8.

Education budget translates to an undramatic spending clip of $321,046 per hour ($14 per capita).* We should also look at some comparative figures. For example, Venezuela is spending $1,255,707 per hour on education (i.e., $11 billion of its National Budget of $18 billion) and Mexico is spending a mere 10% of its National Budget on defense.

In addition, of course, we should also look at the cost consequences of our failure to spend enough and our failure to spend wisely--the dreadful costs of human underdevelopment, social pathology, and civil strife. On the latter point, it would be well to remember the list of cities which claimed they were broke when it came to increased spending on education in the inner city and which, a short time later, found millions to restore civil order and clean up the debris.

It is clear that once we put human growth and development priorities back into the realm of reason, we will hear the cry of the city as not being one of death but for medicine and we will thus be in a posture of working toward the rectification of the man-made ill--the social bubonic plague--that, by definition, affects us all.

Looking back on the 1960's with an Epimethean view (i.e., 20-20 hindsight), it is safe to say the following: our priorities were out of joint--we underspent where the money was most needed (thereby really undermining our security, since a nation's first line of security is contingent upon a maximally developed citizenry) and we shrank away from investment opportunities (the spectrum of human growth and development) that afforded the largest payoff, having not yet learned the maxim that the highest-value resource of a post-industrial nation is its citizenry; much of our money was

---

*Admittedly this constitutes only a small percent of all educational monies spent annually in this country. If all public and private educational expenditures are taken into consideration, we are currently spending $4,566,210 per hour.

mis-spent in the sense that large amounts were allocated to institutions; many of which had already shown conclusively that they were minimally competent and the monies were spent without even minimum guarantees that such expenditures would either lead to or be accompanied by innovation and lasting substantive change. In terms of priorities within education it is fair to say that, by and large, urban education was and continues to be neglected.

The 1960's, though, were not without learning of effect. Small changes were made, a climate making further change possible was fostered, and we learned more about ourselves as a nation and about our institutions and how they work. Perhaps these are the prerequisites to widespread, fundamental change in education, and by extension, society, that will result in an improvement in the quality of our life. In any event, to preserve even these inauspicious beginnings we will have to spend really adequate amounts in the area of human growth and development--and be willing to tax ourselves accordingly--so that human growth and development becomes our national priority and we must find rational alternatives to the mis-spending by devising more effective programs, funding a greater range of recipients (finding alternative institutions), and optimizing the possibilities for drastic and continuing change.

Success here will be synonymous with the cultural self-discipline, which is the hallmark of a thriving society. .